Radical Grace and the Economy

Module I. Denial of Grace

This is *Section I* of the broader workbook called
Radical Grace and the Economy

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Here's the first of 7 issues we'll discuss in this section:

Grace in a Transactional World

The nature of grace in contrast with transactional relations.

Issues

- *Grace is Generous*
  - ✓ Giving until the needs of others are met.
- *Grace is Love*
  - ✓ Meeting the needs of others without demands.
- *Grace is Not Transactional*
  - ✓ Don't give as much as you get — just give — with no thought of whether it's deserved or reciprocated, simply because everyone needs someone to care.

Discussion Questions

1. **What's wrong with being transactional?** Isn't that normal? What is fair trade? Isn't it a good thing?
2. **How is grace different from transaction?** How essential is it? How many people live that way?
3. **Can grace ever become the norm?** Are we too corrupted by our society, by a lifetime of stunted notions of what's proper, to change?

Finding the Balance

The practicality of grace in a transactional culture.

Issues

- *Culture of Grace*
  - ✓ In a culture of universal grace, everyone gives freely and generously, so that everyone gets what they need.
- *The Practicalities*
  - ✓ When all are not in giving mode, some people may get left out. Sometimes fair trade may be the best we can do.
- *Finding a Balance*
  - ✓ In modern life, we need to seek a balance between transaction and grace.
  - ✓ Perhaps impersonal market relations can coexist alongside loving community relations. But we live in a hardcore transactional society where grace is downplayed as a deviation from the norm.

Discussion Questions

1. **In an economy where everyone is giving** without thought of return workable in practice? Does that exist anywhere?
2. **If you're in giving mode** and everyone else is in taking mode, will you survive? Was Christ being naïve?
3. **If we want more grace in our society**, but we're fully transactional in our daily lives, how can we really move people in that direction?

Reciprocity in a Transactional World

Subtle differences between exchange and reciprocity.

Issues

- *A Softer Approach*
  - ✓ There's a softer approach to fairness that can apply loving grace to the interactions of exchange — called reciprocity.
  - ✓ Reciprocity is a broader concept, referring to any exchange that meets the needs of both parties, by whatever means — maybe using money, maybe not — maybe equal, maybe nobody's counting.
- *Unequal is Equal*
  - ✓ Reciprocity allows for exchange that's not equal monetarily — exchange which may include unmeasurable gestures of love and caring that can't be reduced to dollars — like parents feeding their families or one friend doing an unexpected favour for another.
- *Balanced in Other Ways*
  - ✓ Reciprocal exchange may be unequal in money terms because it's balanced in other ways — balanced by some generosity of support and caring that can't be measured in dollars. Or maybe it's not balanced at all — offering mutual support in a generosity of spirit, but who's counting? This broader meaning of the word "reciprocity" is not always understood.

Discussion Questions

1. **How is reciprocity different from equal exchange?** Where do we see it in practice?
2. **When is it appropriate to give less** in money terms than you received? When is it noble? Does that make fair trade irrelevant?
3. **Where have you seen unmetered reciprocity** in your life — an example in your life where money exchange was unequal or absent, but reciprocity was present?

Franciscans in a Profane World

The balancing act of the Franciscan Order offering grace in an indifferent society.

Issues

- *Francis Stepped Out*
  - ✓ Eight centuries ago, Francis of Assisi stepped out of the wealth-revering society of his time, and turned toward the wealth-deploring values of Christ. In the early days he rejected all kinds of commercial relations. Transactional relations of any kind were viewed as a flight from grace.
- *Francis Stayed In*
  - ✓ But Francis also opted to remain in the world and in the church, where people have to come to terms with society.
- *Pockets of Grace*
  - ✓ Over the centuries, the Franciscan Orders evolved into Pockets of Grace in a profane world, whose mission was to reach out to society in healing ways.
- *On the Margins*
  - ✓ Today, their profession is to offer grace to people on the margins of society without asking whether they deserve it. Gratuitous living and mutual support are are in their bones. Their service to others is unbalanced and unmetered — feeding the hungry and crying for justice.

Discussion Questions

1. **If Franciscans wish to live in grace**, how do they get along with such a transactional society? Are Pockets of Grace enough to heal the culture?
2. **Is it enough to be generous to the marginalized?** Is the cry for justice an essential part of grace?
3. **Where do you see Pockets of Grace** in society?

Indigenous and Gratuitous

Indigenous culture views creation with a generosity toward “all my relations”.

Issues

- *Excluded*
  - ✓ Indigenous people were not really integrated into the fragmented culture of settler society. They were not involved when Europeans abandoned all things spiritual and called it *The Enlightenment*. The sterility of equivalent exchange never fully took hold.
- *Native Gratuitousness*
  - ✓ They still retain a native gratuitousness among “all our relations” — which extends to all of creation. The ideal of unbalanced and unmetered generosity has fertile ground within indigenous communities, and it’s finding greater revival the more colonialism is challenged. Living in a transactional world not of their own making, they understand well the deeper concept of reciprocity.

Discussion Questions

1. **When they pay tribute to “all our relations”**, how are they extending reciprocity to all of creation? How can market relations never do that?
2. **Can the native gratuitousness of indigenous culture** simply be transferred over to a colonial society? Are they just out of place in mainstream society, or can they take a leading role?

Challenging a Transactional Culture

Cultural obstacles to greater reciprocity and grace.

Issues

- *Stacked Against Us*
  - ✓ Our culture is stacked against us. To score a good deal in transactional society is the default mindset of the average citizen — for whom equal exchange is the highest virtue.
- *Fails Scrutiny*
  - ✓ But this ideal does not stand up to scrutiny. Fair market exchange often falls short of meeting people's needs. The deeper problem is that equal market exchange often occurs at the expense of those deeper relations of reciprocity where love can outweigh the market.

Discussion Questions

1. **How do we tell people that fair trade is not enough** to meet our needs? How do we tap into people's gut understanding of true reciprocity and contrast that with the myths of trade? How do we draw out people's discontent with the shallow relationships of market culture?
2. **What needs do you have that are not traded** in the marketplace? How do you get them met?

Challenging Public Policy

Seeking an economy of grace.

Issues

- *Challenge Priorities*
  - ✓ We need also challenge those public priorities that misdirect the greatest incentives and advantages — monetary, institutional and legal advantages — toward market ventures. The soft economy of grace and reciprocity is left out of the loop.
- *Redirect Resources*
  - ✓ Government largesse needs to be reconfigured to give adequate resources to non-commercial commitments such as caregiving and all those nurturing activities that make life meaningful and loving — but are not marketable.
- *Guaranteed Income*
  - ✓ This needs to be backed up by alternative forms of income not tied to marketed activities — such as a system of universal guaranteed income.

Discussion Questions

1. **How can public policy determine the needs of people** engaged in activities that have no market value? How can society allocate resources between marketable and non-marketable activities?
2. **Where should government largesse be directed** instead of upwards? To whom?
3. **How much guaranteed income would be enough** for you to support yourself and follow your calling? How would you make the best use of it? Or would you just sit back and do nothing?

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